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ABSTRACT

The study compared nationwide research findings about the districts, superintendents, teachers, programs, and student performance in 642 public school districts with an enrollment of 900 or less to data from a random sample of school districts of similar size in Oklahoma. Data were gathered from superintendents by questionnaire during the 1982-83 school year. Forty five of Oklahoma's 601 school districts, or 64.3 of those surveyed, responded. Although Oklahoma's small school districts closely matched national averages in enrollments, few reported declining enrollments. Oklahoma districts were geographically smaller than average and the last bond issue was half the size of such issues nationally. Oklahoma small school superintendents held more masters and doctoral degrees than the national average, and were rewarded with better salaries. Over 97% held full-time superintendent positions. Teacher salaries were also above average while teaching staff size and teacher/student ratios were close to national averages. Although student performance was slightly lower than average on the National Merit Examination and the Scholastic Aptitude Test, 38.8% of graduating seniors went on to college compared to 38.6% nationally. Oklahoma districts offered fewer sports than average and their utilization of academic and resource personnel generally fell somewhat below national averages. (SB)

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ED237298

A RESEARCH REPORT OF SMALL/RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN OKLAHOMA COMPARED TO SCHOOL DISTRICTS OF SIMILIAR SIZE NATIONWIDE

A Report Prepared for the
Oklahoma State Department of Education
November 17, 1983

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OKLAHOMA

A descriptive report of K-12 public school districts in Oklahoma enrolling 900 students or less compared to nationwide research findings for rural school districts of similiar size. Forty-five districts were surveyed in Oklahoma; 642 districts were surveyed in the national study.

The study gathered data related to the rural district, the school superintendent, the teachers, school programs, and student performance. Data was collected during the 1982-83 school year.

A RESEARCH REPORT OF SMALL/RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN OKLAHOMA COMPARED TO SCHOOL DISTRICTS OF SIMILAR SIZE NATIONWIDE

by
Bruce O. Barker and Ivan D. Muse

INTRODUCTION

Until recently, comparatively few educators have taken an interest in the strengths and challenges of America's small/rural schools, despite the fact that almost one-third of America's youngsters attend schools classified as rural (REA News, 1982). With the decline in school consolidation and the current population shift to non-metropolitan areas (Beal, 1975), it is clearly evident that rural schools will continue to play a significant role in the future educational development of a large segment of our society. Currently, very little data are available about rural school systems in our society. This is particularly true of K-12 systems enrolling less than 1,000 students (Nachtigal, 1979).

The purpose of this report is to present major findings of K-12 rural school districts in Oklahoma with those of a nationwide study completed by Barker (1983), in which descriptive data were collected on K-12 and/or 1-12 rural school systems enrolling 900 students or less. The findings were gathered during the 1982-83 academic year.

METHOD

Using the Education Directory, Fall 1980: Local Education Agencies as a reference, a hand count was made of all K-12 and 1-12 public school districts in the United States which enroll 900 students or less. Of the nation's 15,601 public districts, 4,125 (26.4 percent) were identified as qualifying K-12 or 1-12 systems. In Oklahoma, 234 qualifying districts were identified. These districts represented 38.9 percent of the state's 601

operating public school districts and enrolled 135,622 students.

Questionnaires were mailed to superintendents of 816 randomly selected districts in the nationwide study. Completed questionnaires were returned from 642 districts (78.7 percent). The same questionnaire was mailed to 70 districts in Oklahoma, of which 45 responded (64.3 percent). The questionnaire posed questions related to the rural district, the school superintendent, the teachers, school programs and student performance.

FINDINGS

A comparison of the major findings in Oklahoma with those of the national study are reported in Table 1.

CONCLUSION

Oklahoma is one of the leading states in the nation in relation to the number of rural districts which make up the state's public school system. It is clearly evident that the operation and management of the small/rural district poses challenges and rewards, in many ways, uniquely different from those of a large urban district, and even many larger rural districts. It is hoped that the information presented herein will assist Oklahoma educators, and others interested in education, to more knowledgeably enhance the strengths and address the needs of the small/rural districts within the state.

TABLE I

COMPARISON OF RESEARCH FINDINGS ON K-12 PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN OKLAHOMA AND THOSE NATIONWIDE, ENROLLING 900 STUDENTS OR LESS. 1983.

Variable	Oklahoma	Nation
The Rural District		
1. Average student enrollment per district	457	436
2. Average number of schools per district	1.3	2.4
3. Average student enrollment per school	170.0	188.5
4. Average geographical size of district in square miles	159	245
5. Percent of student's bussed to school	54.5	64.4
6. Mean farthest one-way distance students bussed (miles)	20.7	19.0
7. Percent of districts reporting receipt of state aid or funding for small school districts	9.3	24.2
8. Average dollar amount of last bond issue	$364,837	$716,000
9. Percent of districts passing last bond issue	93.3	87.5
10. Percent of districts reporting declining enrollments	9.1	36.2
The Superintendent		
1. Average age of superintendent	46.9	47.1
2. Percent of superintendents holding master's as highest degree	64.4	55.4
3. Percent of superintendents holding Ed. Specialist degree	15.6	31.5
4. Percent of superintendents holding doctorate degree	20.0	13.1
5. Average tenure as superintendent (years)	6.0	8.5
6. Percent of superintendents reporting annual salary in excess of $35,000	47.7	37.4
7. Percent of full-time superintendents	97.8	75.8
8. Percent of superintendent/principal combinations	2.2	20.9
9. Percent of superintendents who worked for district prior to appointment as superintendent	31.1	29.4
The Teachers		
1. Average number of elementary teachers in district	14.8	14.4
2. Average number of secondary teachers in district	16.9	15.7
3. Average teacher/student ratio	1:14.4	1:14.5
4. Percent teacher turnover (1982-83)	12.8	8.6
5. Mean beginning teacher salary (1982-83)	$13,211	$12,492
6. Mean top teacher salary (1982-83)	$21,321	$20,506
7. Mean current teacher salary (1982-83)	$17,256	$16,377

Table 1 (continued)

Variable	Oklahoma	Nation
8. Average number of "steps" to reach top of salary schedule	14.7	14.5
9. Average number of different subject preparations for secondary teachers	3.2	3.5
Student Performance		
1. Mean number of graduating seniors	32.9	34.5
2. Percent of graduating seniors recognized as National Merit Exam Finalists	0.7	1.0
3. Percent of graduating seniors achieving scores of 25 or above on American College Test (ACT Exam)	7.6	7.5
4. Percent of graduating seniors achieving scores of 1100 or above on Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT Exam)	1.1	2.6
5. Percent of graduating seniors going on to college	38.8	38.6
6. Percent of graduating seniors going to technical school	7.1	14.1
School Programs		
1. Percent of districts exploying either full or part-time, the following resource personnel:		
Special Education	93.2	86.6
School Counselor	54.5	79.4
School Psychologist	18.2	33.8
School Nurse	11.4	45.1
Librarian/Media Specialist	70.5	80.9
Adult Education Director	2.3	22.0
Community Education Director	4.5	7.8
Vocational Education Director	29.5	22.0
2. Percent of districts offering the following sports programs:		
Football	54.5	69.2
Basketball	100	100
Baseball	86.4	55.4
Softball	43.2	37.1
Volleyball	36.4	65.7
Cross Country Track	13.7	23.3
Soccer	0	7.0
Wrestling	15.9	25.2
Track and Field	59.1	78.7
Golf	13.6	22.4
Tennis	13.6	16.3
Swimming	11.4	3.2
Gymnastics	2.3	5.9

Table 1 (continued)

Variable	Oklahoma	Nation
3. Percent of districts offering the following courses as a part of their curriculum:		
Spanish	38.1	41.8
German	4.8	9.7
French	9.5	18.9
Calculus	19.0	35.9
Chemistry	73.8	79.4
Computer Science	42.9	60.3
Electronics	9.5	13.0
Vocational Agriculture	83.3	63.1
Physics	50.0	67.7

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